



HEALTH

Hiking Helps Divers Stay in Shape

By Gretchen M. Ashton Mar 21, 2016

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Getting outdoors and exploring nature topside is one of the best ways divers can condition and strengthen their bodies for diving.

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Staying active topside helps keep divers healthy underwater, and one of the easiest and most enjoyable ways to do so is to get outdoors on a hike. Near home, community parks often offer trail systems around local waterways, such as lagoons and lakes, through wildlife preserves and across picturesque cityscapes. When traveling, many dive destinations offer opportunities to hike lush tropical forests, coastal trails and volcanoes. Hikes may be conducted with groups and guides for interests such as bird watching, and are often combined with other recreational activities such as camping and kayaking.

Hiking and Diving

Hiking and diving are similar in their use of multiple muscle groups, movements associated with wearing backpacks like scuba tanks, the handling of gear, traversing uneven terrain and the feel-good experience of being close to nature. And, just like a favorite pair of fins, a well broken-in pair of trail shoes or hiking boots is a must.

But hiking and diving are quite different too. Although many aspects of hiking resemble diving, hiking gets all the credit for producing the adaptive physical responses of training and improved fitness, which are precluded at depth when diving. When climbing and descending mountain trails, aerobic endurance improves with steady increases in heart rate for longer periods of time. When hiking, the lower body, in particular, is strengthened with repetitive exertion using the muscles of the legs, back, hips and torso. Hiking provides big crossover benefits for divers.

Hiking on dive vacations takes a bit of planning. First, it's important to remember to avoid physical exertion and higher altitudes for 24 hours after diving, and diving at high altitudes requires special training as well. Divers are also trained to avoid exertion at depth to reduce risks associated with decompression sickness. If planning to combine strenuous hiking with diving, it's best to prepare a few months in advance, hiking and exercising more vigorously on dry land to establish and maintain physical fitness for all activities.

Practice Mountain Climbers

Mountain Climbers are a great exercise to help divers prepare for both hiking and diving, and since no special equipment is necessary, they may be performed in a gym, at home or outdoors. Begin in the straight-arm plank position. The plank itself is a foundational exercise, and holding the position for just one minute at a time helps strengthen arms, abs, chest and low back. It's also a good static exercise for divers with shoulder conditions that preclude push-ups. The straight-arm plank becomes a mountain climber when the knees are alternately and repetitively pulled to the torso as shown. Mountain climbers may be performed for a full minute or divers can count repetitions, doing sets to equal about a minute of work at a time. To perform mountain climbers correctly, contract the abs when pulling the knee toward the torso; keep the upper body as still as possible; keep hands in place; and try not to raise the hips out of this inline spinal position. Alternate legs at a steady pace, using good form. If possible, perform mountain climbers quickly but make certain that one foot is on the floor at all times. Alternating legs should emulate climbing, not hopping. Performing exercises like mountain climbers a few times a week, along with practicing a generally healthy lifestyle and other exercise, will help both hiking and diving become easier and more enjoyable activities.



Contributor
Gretchen M. Ashton
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Gretchen brings her passion for diving and fitness together as the founder of ScubaFit® the only fitness for diving certification which is also approved by both diving and fitness agencies. She is an advanced diver, NBFEE and ISSA Elite Personal Trainer, Specialist in Fitness Therapy and Nutrition, an AAU World Champion Hall-of-Fame athlete, and a mentor for Water Women, Inc. She shares her message with divers by visiting dive clubs, presenting at scuba shows, as a radio guest, as the publisher of FitDiver® Magazine, and with FitDiver® mobile apps. She widely published with more than 125 articles for diving publications and blogs. For more information or to contact Gretchen, visit www.scubafit.com.

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